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S E C R E T BOGOTA 000243 SIPDIS NOFORN
E.O. 12958: DECL: 2035/02/12
TAG: PTER, MOPS, PINS, PREL, PGOV, PHUM, CO
SUBJECT: QUESTIONS ABOUND ON WHETHER AIR STRIKE HIT INDIGENOUS TERRITORY
REF: 10 BOGOTA 171
CLASSIFIED BY: Brian A. Nichols, Deputy Chief of Mission; REASON: 1.4(B), (C), (D)

SUMMARY -----

1. (S/NF) Post has received disparate accounts of a January 30 air strike carried out by the Colombia Air Force that occurred in an area inhabited by indigenous people. The indigenous group has maintained that the strike was an error.

2. (C) On February 4, Poloff and USAID personnel met with XXXXXXXXXXXX of the Urada-Jiguamiando Reservation XXXXXXXXXXXX, Embera-Katio indigenous group. He also told us the father was hit by shrapnel in the spine and will be unable to walk, while the mother and two children were also present, but had no serious injuries).

3. (C) Both XXXXXXXXXXXX, and XXXXXXXXXXXX, rejected the Colombian Air Force's explanation that the strike targeted the FARC, although they admitted that the strike was in an area inhabited by indigenous people.

4. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX, confirmed the Indigenous Organization in Antioquia (OIA), which initially denounced the incident, is preparing a formal complaint with the military. The military says the strike hit outside indigenous territory.

5. (C) General Tito Pinilla, Chief of Air Operations in the Colombian Military, told Emboffs on February 2 that the air strikes by the Seventh Air Force were in an area inhabited by indigenous people. He said an indigenous man and woman with no licit reason for being in the camp had been injured in the raid. Pinilla also explained that the military is conducting an investigation to follow up on the incident.

6. (U) On February 9, leading newspaper "El Tiempo" reported that a military judge is opening an investigation. According to the article, the judge is looking for the truth about the incident.

7. (S/NF) Other information available at Post suggests that Pinilla's version of events is largely correct: a sensitive high-value target operation. The strike was 2.5 kilometers from the village; GOC information suggests this was beyond the border of the indigenous reservation. The indigenous group has denied the strike.

8. (S/NF) Comment: The contradictory versions of events make it difficult to determine what happened. What is apparent is that the GOC has admitted that the strike was in an area inhabited by indigenous people.